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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 002862

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KIRKUK: US, UK ENGAGE KIRKUK ETHNIC GROUPS TO
ACHIEVE CONSENSUS GOVERNMENT

Ref: Baghdad 2746
Baghdad 2860

This is a REO Kirkuk cable.

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. U.S. Kirkuk Regional Embassy Office Coordinator (RC) and UK Acting Consul General called on Arab, Turkmen, and Kurdish blocs of the Kirkuk Provincial Council July 3 and 4 to urge them to form a consensus government. The Turkmen and Arab blocs say they will remain engaged in the political process if they obtain four key government posts -- deputy governor, mayor, appointments committee chairman, and reconstruction committee chairman, and have a say in balancing appointments to the director generalships. While emotions ran high, all agreed to meet again July 7. Separately, the Kirkuk Provincial Council met July 4; they and delayed elections on a deputy governor until July 18 and sharply criticized Iraq's Prime Minister for recent statements on Kirkuk. END SUMMARY.

Kurdish, Turkmen, and Arab Blocs
Meet for First Time in Months

2. (SBU) Kirkuk REO -- together with UK Acting Consul General and U.S. 116BCT team government commander -- initiated the first face-to-face meeting of Turkmen, Arab and Kurdish political leaders since January elections to discuss provincial government on July 3. A second session was held July 4. Attendees are listed in para 14. RC told the group that the U.S. seeks consensus in appointments for both cabinet and the constitutional committee. Excluding core constituencies in this fragile phase of democracy could dampen faith in the process and embolden insurgents. We expected this effort would pay off soon agreement to include 15 new Sunnis in the constitutional committee in Baghdad.

3. (SBU) RC said the U.S. had similar hopes for Kirkuk, also a sensitive issue that needed broad consensus to preserve its unique ethnic identity. RC stressed that this same message had been delivered by Embassy Baghdad to senior Kurdish leaders (ref A). She told the group that if it could arrive at agreements, the U.S. would do what it could to back them up at all levels and with all players who had shown an interest in the future of this province.

Myriad Complaints Lobbed, No One Injured

4. (SBU) All participants thanked the U.S. for bringing them together and agreed that consensus is required to move ahead in Kirkuk. Mohammad Kamal (KDP) complained that 28 meetings had failed to produce results from Turkmen and Arabs. Anwar Biraqdar (Turkmen Justice Party) said consensus would not be possible with only one leadership post (deputy governor) being offered to the combined list of Turkmen and Arab blocs.

5. (SBU) Zhala Younis (Iraqi Turkmen Front) argued that the Kurds had reached agreement last week with the Turkmen but the Kurds had told them they might veto individual nominees. Several participants complained that the KBL was "vetting" candidates to see if they supported Kirkuk's inclusion into Kurdistan. Rizgar Ali Hamjan (PUK) told the group that the KBL had not levied this condition, and said press accounts to the contrary (ref B) were false.

6. (SBU) Ahmed Mohamed Al-Zubaydi (Iraqi National Gathering) questioned the Kurds' interest in consensus, as they now encumbered all key government posts in the province, leaving only five unimportant directorates to the Arabs. (Comment: Zubaydi overlooked the Northern Oil Company directorship, which does provide significant employment for Arabs, even if oil revenues do not accrue to provincial coffers.)

Arabs Claim Talabani Reneged on 2004 Agreement
to Rotate Governor Job Among Ethnic Groups

17. (SBU) Ahmed Hameed Al-Ubaydi (Iraqi Republican Gathering, Sunni Arab) and Hussein al-Jabouri (Arab Consultative Council) said Kirkuk should rotate the governorship among its three main communities. He said the principle was accepted by PUK leader Jalal Talabani in an agreement signed February 2004. (Note: On July 5, Shwan Qliasani, a former senior official of the PUK, told RC that there was such an agreement; we will try to get a copy.)

Turkmen and Arab Bloc Want Four Key Posts

18. (SBU) The Turkmen and Arabs relayed that they would return to government if given four slots to divide between them: deputy governor; Kirkuk mayor; reconstruction committee chairman; and appointments committee chair. Ubaydi pointed out that the provincial council had no right to elect the city mayor (ref B) and said this should provide cover for his removal. The Turkmen also requested that Kirkuk directorates be distributed fairly among blocs.

Council Chairman Condemns Ja'afari on Article 58

19. (SBU) The Provincial Council also met July 4. Kirkuk Brotherhood List (KBL) members voted to delay elections for the deputy governor until July 18. Council Chairman Hamajan alleged that PM Ja'afari had said that the Transitional National Assembly (TNA) will not "approve" Article 58. He asserted this proved the PM had succumbed to the wishes of foreign powers, and warned against intervention by Turkey and Iran in Iraq's internal affairs. Kamal (KDP) added that any Iraqi leader who does not abide by the TAL should be removed from office. The Council also discussed committees but deferred substantive action. (Note. In an interview with the al Sharq al Awsat newspaper on June 28, Prime Minister Jaffari actually said that the TAL had solved the Kirkuk issue, but that "we should give sufficient time and delay action until the question of its mixed population is resolved". He listed Kirkuk's various ethnic, sectarian and religious groups and noted "even Turkey is worried about the Turkman there, and this means the issue has taken on a regional significance." Ja'fari's comments are in line with Article 58(C) of the TAL which provides that the "permanent resolution of disputed territories, including Kirkuk, shall be deferred until after these measures [i.e. IPCC claims adjudications and recommendations on administrative boundaries] are completed, a fair and transparent census has been conducted and the permanent constitution has been ratified." Nonetheless, the reaction on the ground has been overwhelmingly negative. End Note.)

Difficult Dynamics

110. (SBU) This was the first serious meeting among the three bloc leaders; dynamics were difficult. Hamajan (PUK) said he had only one hour for the meeting, declined to dine with the others, then interrupted their meal and tried to leave mid-stream to attend "more important" events. Kamal insisted on speaking Kurdish; RC succeeded in keeping with Arabic, the only common language, to save time for Hamajan. The Turkman Younis blamed all failed negotiations on Kamal personally. The Governor (who as the only Kurd in the July 3 meeting was quite conciliatory), turned to stone in the presence of PUK and KDP representatives on July 4.

111. (SBU) When the Kurds refused to meet July 5, and Jabouri snorted that the situation did not bear further delay. Both Kurds and Turkmen objected to the Kurds' suggestion that further negotiations be limited to exchange of written proposals. All parties urged the U.S. to attend future meetings, to keep order. Finally, they agreed to meet again July 7.

112. (SBU) Comment: We will try to keep dialog going, but the window for progress will close soon without further engagement with KDP and PUK presidents.

113. (U) Participants in July 3 and 4 Meetings:

Kurdish Leaders (and Kirkuk Brotherhood List members)

Governor Abdulrahman Mustafa (independent)

Council Chairman Rizgar Ali (PUK)(July 4 only)
Council Member Mohammad Kamal (KDP)(July 4 only)
Turkmen leaders

Younis Biraqdar (Turkmen Council Chairman)
Anwar Biraqdar (Turkmen Justice Party General
Secretary) Council Member Zhala Younis (Iraqi Turkmen

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Arab leaders

Ahmed Hameed al-Ubaydi (Iraqi Republican Gathering,
Kirkuk Office Head)
Ahmed Mohamed al-Zubaydi (Iraqi National Gathering
Kirkuk Office Head)
Hussein al-Jaburi (Arab Consultative Council Head)